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THE RELATION OF THE HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE TO THE STUDENT'S LIFE PROBLEMS

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Man's all-inclusive, earthly ideal is that he may live a successful life. Whatever he may do or say in his gayer hours, and in whatever life calling he may be engaged, this is the ideal of his serious, sober, and more fundamental self. How much organic insight has he to guide him and to stimulate him in the realization of his vaguely defined goal? How adequate is his knowledge of the factors in general, which are operative in successful living and in worth-while self-realization? These are typical of the questions which occur to one as he observes the high-school or college graduate begin his "groping," as one beholds him coming to realize vaguely his earthly qualities and his human limitations, and as one sees him striving to discover an object for attainment worthy of his talents.

Self-realization, in so far as it is attainable in man's finite state, and, therefore, successful living, is the result of a proper sequence of experiences, choices, and acts extending from infancy throughout life. Some of these experiences, choices, and acts are more far-reaching in their consequences and more determinative in their character than are others. Therefore, if errors and mistakes can be avoided in these more consequential matters, he who sails his bark o'er life's perilous sea may reasonably expect to approximate the living of a successful life throughout each of the successive stages of his existence and to merit upon the completion of his earthly career the plaudit, "Well done." Such a training and disciplining of himself as will insure the proper and effective prolongation of his youth, the wise discovery of a life occupation, the right choice of a life companion, and the early discovery and acceptance

of that religion which shall be to him soul-satisfying and life-giving are undoubtedly among the few dominating, if indeed they are not the dominating, concerns of each life.

Observing the "groping" of the graduates of our high schools and repeatedly discovering very keenly my inability to offer any very satisfactory or helpful suggestions (either to myself or to the inquiring youths) to aid them in their quest, the writer started the inquiry in his mind about three years ago as to whether the public schools were doing all that they might legitimately do to equip their students by the date of graduation with a sufficient basis for the adequate and proper solution of the weightier matters upon which the attainments of a lifetime hang. A careful pursuance of the inquiry soon revealed that there are at least two respects in which the schools may be of larger service to the student in the solution of some of his greater life problems. In the first place, the schools may plan to employ every opportunity that presents itself in connection with the regular school courses to show the relation of the work in hand to the solution of the far-reaching problems in practical life. Of the great and important work that may be done in this connection, I shall not speak at this time, except to hint that one result following from the courses in nature-study and agriculture in the schools should be a knowledge, on the part of our students, of the interests and equipment which must be possessed by the successful farmer. Through history and current social studies, the students should become familiar with the type of men who have attained success in literature, art, invention, business, and statesmanship. The courses in science should afford a telescopic view of the equipment needed in mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc., by those who would successfully prosecute such scientific pursuits as engineering.

The second respect in which the school may render effective service to its output is through the organization and presentation of a course of work which has for its special object the treatment of the more fundamental life problems together with the basic facts and principles underlying their solution. It is to set forth the course of work which I have been developing dur-

ing the last three years with the senior classes of the high school¹ under my supervision that this article is written. The work began under the plan of meeting the seniors during one regular recitation period every Monday afternoon of the last term (eighteen weeks) that the seniors were in high school. The organization of the course and the topics considered have gradually evolved in the light of experience. The discussion will concern itself with the present scope and purposes of the course, rather than with its growth into its present status.

The aim in the course is to lead the students to a discovery of some of the principles underlying the living of a successful life. The view has been urged that one's best energy should at all times be spent in *living a life*, rather than in *making a living*. It is quite generally conceded, I take it, that there are entirely too many *farming men* and not enough *men farming*, that there are many *preaching men* while there are but few *men preaching*, etc. The difference is a wide one—in the first case, the job runs the man, while in the second case, the man runs the job. In the doing of any piece of work, the largest return should be to the inner man, while the external, financial return should be simply incidental.

This large aim, pursued with the attitude suggested, has resulted in a course of work organized in broad outlines as elaborated below. Attention is directed (1) to the complexity of modern society; (2) to the great contrast between primitive and modern society, bringing out that whereas each man under primitive conditions was his own keeper, under modern conditions each man is kept by his brethren and is in turn the keeper of his brethren, and that whereas great independence prevailed in primitive life, the greatest dependence prevails in modern life; (3) to the steps by which the various institutions of society became differentiated; (4) to society's growth in complexity between the institutions as well as within each institution, and (5) to the strenuous character of the life that is lived under modern conditions. Following this, modern life is investigated with a view to determining the great and

¹ The Public High School, Franklin, Indiana.

manifold work that is awaiting laborers and to discovering the opportunities for service and for fame which are presenting themselves to our youth who can discern them. In the light of the work to be done, the qualifications of the socially efficient worker in the matter of physical basis, education, character, and ideals have been developed.

The second section of the course turns from the social situation to the individual as such, with a view to determining the laws of his being in harmony with which he must proceed in his effort to become an effective factor out in society. Then the idealized, socially equipped and developed being is carried back into the social situation in an effort to see how his equipment and character are to be modified and molded by the work which he does for society in his chosen calling.

The third section of the course keeps in view the individual as he looks forward to and discovers the work he can do best for society and himself and the individual as he works for the social good, with a view to discovering certain guiding and stimulating facts and principles. Here the importance of a thorough perspective in the life calling chosen is emphasized in an effort to show that accurate forward steps in any field are impossible unless one knows the history of the field thoroughly. A knowledge of the types of people and of their common, general reactions is shown to be valuable in dealing effectively in all social relations. It is shown that one should not approach the question of a life occupation so much with the idea of *choosing* his life occupation as with the idea of *discovering* the calling in light of a general knowledge of the fields open and in need of laborers and in light of the interests and abilities found in himself, considered in connection with the known requirements for success in the fields under consideration. The far-reaching importance of keeping one's self at the highest possible level of efficiency and of expending one's best self in his life work and of husbanding one's energies to these ends is next considered. The relation of the matters considered in this last topic to the prolongation of one's youth both in body and in the educable attitude and ability of mind is carefully developed. Following

this discussion comes a careful and rather detailed investigation of the effects of heredity, environment, parental influence, and the life companion as factors determining one's attainments. The work closes with two companion studies, the first emphasizing causes of failure or hindrances to attainment in life and the second setting forth the different degrees or levels of attainment that are accomplishable in a life career.

The above course of work has been developed through lectures, reports by students upon topics assigned for study and investigation, round-table discussions, developmental lessons with certain topics, quizzes, and some textbook work. The underlying and organizing principles of the courses have been drawn from the fields of economics, social economy, ethics, hygiene, psychology, and pedagogy.

My sources of material for guidance, inspiration, and class use were as many and as varied as my education and training to date have lead me into. I can think of no field in which I have read or studied that has not made indispensable contributions. The difficult problem was to find sources to which to send the students. In dealing with some of the problems, it was not practicable to attempt to send them to any literature whatever. Their main sources were several standard texts on economics and political economy, special articles in the leading current magazines (*World's Work*, *Review of Reviews*, etc., were most used) and such books as Jordan's *Call of the Twentieth Century*, Jordan's *The Blood of the Nation*, Smiles's *Self Help*, Conwell's *Manhood's Morning*, Vanderlip's *Business and Education*, Hadley's *Baccalaureate Addresses*, Hyde's *The College Man*, Gulick's *Efficient Life*, Henderson's *Social Spirit in America*, Henderson's *Social Elements*, Bowker's *The Arts of Life*, Wingate's *What Shall Our Boys Do for a Living*, Lorimer's *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son*, Reich's *Success in Life*. Each class was required to purchase and read some book relating to the general field under study. The same book was not used by any two classes, but the following have been used: Marden's *Choosing a Career*, Fowler's *Starting in Life*, Warner's *The Young Woman in Modern Life*, McLeod's

A Young Man's Problems, Huling's *Letters of a Business Woman to Her Niece*, and Beveridge's *The Young Man and the World*. During the last term, two books were read and reported upon by the students, a portion of the students buying one book and an equal number buying the other book.

I think I have never had a more satisfying sense of attempting to do a piece of work of genuine importance and of lasting influence than I have had in presenting this course to my students. It has been the means of bringing me into direct heartfelt contact with the sober, serious side of my students both in class and in private conference. It has seemed to be the means of exposing the student at his best and on his highest level at all times.

At various times, I have called for criticisms in writing from the students upon the work we were doing. Two brief extracts below are typical of the attitude embodied in these criticisms. One says, "This course has given me a broader view of what may rightly be expected of me and of what is attainable in life. It has impressed me with the importance of making proper decisions in certain fundamental matters as soon after I reach maturity as possible. I have been led to see how I may investigate for myself the advantages and disadvantages of the various careers open to me. I feel that our discussions have been too largely regarding matters of concern to the boys and that more attention should be given to treating the problems so they will be of greater value to the girls."

Another says, "New lines of thought have been opened to me and much good advice as to the careers that are open and as to how to start in one has been imparted. It has been worth much to me to be impressed with the advantages and vice versa of different careers and with the fact that by careful preparation and foresight I can very largely determine my attainments in life. I feel that my high-school training would be incomplete without this course; it will be of much practical value to me in solving the problems that I shall meet immediately after graduation."